The essays collected together in the volume to be published by the Government of West Bengal appeared originally in this paper in the period between October 1951-May 1954. The enthusiastic welcome accorded to them by anthropologists, sociologists, welfare workers, planners and others has been responsible for their reappearance here in the forthcoming volume. The willingness of the Government of West Bengal to publish them in book form is yet another recognition of the usefulness of the articles. The contributors feel gratified that their slight effort should have met with such a welcome. Their grateful thanks are due to the Government of West Bengal for their enterprise in undertaking to publish them in a book.

It is necessary to stress the fact that these essays were written for laymen. The contributors have tried to make their articles readable, and to this end technical terms have been avoided as far as possible. It is also necessary to add that the essays are not theoretical. They are an attempt to bring the facts of village life to the notice of the reader. Some of them were written after three or four months in the field, and while the field-work was still in progress. Field-work is a whole-time and consuming activity, and one is often under the spell of the region one is living in. This has inducted two of our contributors, Mr Bailey and Mr Newell, to completely rewrite their essays. The other contributors have allowed their essays to stand more or less as they originally appeared in *The Economic Weekly*, except Prof D G Mandelbaum who has chosen to contribute on an all-India theme which has direct relevance to the work of planners and welfare workers (see last issue).

While each contributor was invited to write on the social life of the village he had intensively studied, he was given the freedom to write on an aspect of it which he found most interesting or thought most important. Villages differ from each other, especially so villages in widely-separated parts of the country. For instance, the 'hermit' village of Malana is quite different from Dilwara in Rajasthan or Kumbapettai in Tanjore or Hattarahalli in Mysore. The physical, social and linguistic isolation of Malana has enabled it to be more or less completely autonomous, and Mr Rosser understandably concentrates on the manner in which the local forces of law and order, independent of the authority of any government, provincial or central, operate there, while the striking thing about Dilwara is the sudden effects of the abolition of Zamindari, and about Hattarahalli, the effects of nearness to a big and highly industrialised city. The difference between villages cannot all be reduced to the degree of proximity to the forces of urbanization, industrialisation and westernisation. Each village has a pattern and mode of life which is to some extent unique. Villages next door to each other differ considerably, and this fact is recognized by rural folk. Besides, every contributor has his own special interest, and each essay is the outcome of the contact of a particular mind with a particular field-situation. This is not to deny regional or even all-India uniformities.

The villages described in these essays thus cover a wide range. Geographically speaking they cover the country between Himachal Pradesh in the north and Tanjore in the south, and Rajasthan in the west and West Bengal in the east. There are, however, conspicuous gaps, eg. Andhra, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bihar. These essays include villages which are inhabited by Hindus or tribal folks exclusively as well as mixed villages in which Hindus and tribal folk live together. A few villages include members of more than one religion, either Hindus and Muslims or Hindus and Christians. A few are bi- or tri-lingual.

Dr Dube's village in the Deccan is one of the most complex, including as it does Marathi and Telugu-speaking Hindus, Muslims and three separate tribal groups. The range of castes covered in each Hindu group too is great.

The number of castes living in a village is an important thing. From the point of view of the social anthropologist, the greater the number of castes the greater the complexity. Each caste has a culture of its own which is to some extent different from the culture of the others. The structure becomes more complex as the number of castes increases. The structure of the Gaddi village of Goshen, or Malana or the Bhil villages of Rajasthan, is certainly simpler, for instance than that of the villages described by Drs Sarma, Gough, and Dube. Size too is an important matter in this connection; the smallest village in the series has about 500 inhabitants while the largest about 2,750. The largest has certainly more caste and tribal groups than the smallest. Some of the villages, for instance, Goshen, Malana and the Bhil villages of Rajasthan, enjoy a degree of isolation which is denied to the others. Dr Sarma's and Mr Beals's villages are both near big cities and might, in the not distant future, become suburbs, though at present they still retain many rural features. Proximity to a city should not be measured in terms of distance but communicability. A village which is fifty miles from a city but on a bus route is more exposed to urban influences than another which is only fifteen miles away, but is at some distance from the bus route. This point is obvious, but not always kept in mind.

Dr Miller's villages on the Kerala coast in south India are dispersed while most of the others described in this series are nucleated. Hut dispersed villages are not however confined to the west coast of India— they seem to occur elsewhere too, for instance, in the Bhil country to the east and north of Gujarat and in Cooch Behar and the villages described by Dr Dube. What other differences accompany nucleation or dispersal? This question can only be answered after a systematic comparison of a nucleated village with a dispersed one. An important difference seems to be that whereas in the case of a nucleated village, the problem of defending the village from dacoits and wild animals is thrown on all the huts and houses collected together in the settlement, in the case of the dispersed village, each farm

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**Village Studies**

-M N Srinivas

The village studies which appeared in this paper and are being reprinted by the West Bengal Gov't. are not only planned and edited to write in non-technical language.
has to protect itself against its enemies. The kin-group owning the farm and its servants must have enough man-power to be able to defend itself when necessary. The homes or huts built on the farm must be built with an eye to detente—an extreme instance of this is provided by a Coorg or Nayar house. It would be interesting to find out if dispersed villages are associated with large unilinear groups and a martial tradition among the farmers?

II

It is a welcome fact that anthropologists from India, the United Kingdom and USA have contributed to this series. If there is any regret at all it is that anthropologists from other parts of the world have not contributed to it.* The personality of the anthropologist is an extremely important factor in the study of a society. His cultural and social background, his intellectual training, and his temperament and interests all go to determine what he selects for observation and how he interprets it. Two anthropologists writing about the same tribe or village will write accounts which in many ways will be different from each other. What the anthropologist selects for observation is to some extent dependant upon the society in which he has been born and grown up. For instance, an anthropologist from USA might find the strict segregation of the sexes prevalent in our society strange, while an anthropologist from another country may not. He might find something else strange. While an anthropologist trained to record practically everything about the society he is studying, in practice what hits his eye is something which he is not used to in his own society.

There is another fact which is worthy of note. It is much more difficult for an Indian to observe his own society than it is for a non-Indian. It is true that a number of languages are spoken in India, and within the same linguistic region, there are important differences between castes, and finally, we have a variety of tribes each of which differs from the other. Yet in spite of all this there is a certain unity, and above all, a sense of familiarity which is hostile to curiosity. At a deeper level, one is so fundamentally and even hopelessly enslaved in one's own society, that detachment is well nigh impossible. Such detachment is necessary if one wants to present an account of one's society which is intelligible to others. Discussions with non-Indian anthropologists or laymen about India frequently reveal the elementary things one took for granted about one's own society. Anyone who maintains that there is no need for non-Indian anthropologists to study our society as there are enough Indian anthropologists, is doing a great dis-service to the cause of social anthropology in India.

It is also not true that there are enough social anthropologists in our country. Anthropology in India means mostly physical anthropology and unsystematic ethnology. Social anthropology, as the term is understood in Great Britain, is still in its infancy. The empirical study of human societies with a view to making theoretical statements about relations between different kinds of social institutions, has still not come to be given its rightful place. In fact, it has been stifled by physical anthropology, ethnology, sociology and social work. It is only now that social anthropology is beginning to come into its own. It is both a difficult and an expensive subject, but nowadays, only a "science" can afford to be expensive. Field-work experience, preferably in at least two different societies, is recognised as a necessary qualification to call oneself a social anthropologist. Intensive field-work means that the field-worker has to spend between 18-24 months in the village or tribe he wishes to study, and this has to be succeeded by 12-18 months devoted to writing up a part of the data collected. And before a man undertakes his first field-work he will have to have an intimate knowledge of modern anthropological theory. Theory and field-work are closely dependent upon each other, and the difference between the data collected by anthropologists of the Victorian era and modern anthropologists is directly due to the growth, of theory in the intervening period.

In brief, social anthropology requires a long period of apprenticeship which includes at the very least one spell of intensive field-work. This makes it an expensive subject. The poverty of our universities, especially where the humanities are concerned, makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to undertake intensive field-research, and even for them money is not available. If there were no non-Indians to make these studies, they would not be done at all. The little money that is available in the country for anthropological research is spent mostly on physical anthropology and ethnology.

III

The unity of the village is a point made by many of the contributors to this series. A body of people living in a restricted area, at some distance from other similar groups, with extremely poor roads between them the majority of the people being engaged in agricultural activity, all closely dependent upon each other economically and otherwise, and having a vast body of common experience, must have some sense of unity. The point is so simple and obvious that it seems hardly worth making it but for the existence of the institution of caste. Caste is even today an institution of great strength, and as marriage and inter-dining are forbidden with members of other castes, the members of a caste living in a village have many important ties with their fellow caste men living in neighbouring villages. These ties are so powerful that a few people have been led into asserting that the unity of the village is a myth and that the only thing which counts is caste. Secondly, in spite of the fact that communications between villages are still rather poor and were much poorer in the past, they were far from being self-contained. Intimate links, economic, religious and social, existed between neighbouring villages. It is argued that the many and strong ties between villages came in the way of

* I regret it very much that Indian contributors to the series are so few.—Ed.
the development of a sense of village unity. If in the nucleated villages, a sense of unity is weakened if not destroyed by caste and by the interdependence of villages, it ought to be even weaker in dispersed villages. The unity of the village is not then an axiom to be taken for granted, but something that has to be shown to exist. The view that the solidarity of caste is so great that it nullifies the unity of the village community in those villages in which live more than one caste, is so plausible that it has misled not a few. But a moment's reflection will expose its fallacy. It is true that caste is an institution of prodigious strength, and that it is pervasive. It under­ takes numerous activities, and occasionally, the members of a sub-caste living in neighbouring villages meet together to consider a matter of common concern to the caste. But all this does not make a caste self-sufficent. The castes living in a village or other local area are inter­ dependent economically and other­ wise. Ideally, each caste enjoys a monopoly of occupation, and this monopoly both unites as well as divides the people enjoying the monopoly. While the members re­ sent other castes taking over their occupation (this is not true of agriculture though) and secrets of the occupation are closely guarded among the members, rivalry be­ tween the members for the custom of the other castes is an important fact that divides them. The fact that the members of a caste in a village are, at any rate in south India, linked by ties of kinship does not lessen the rivalry. It is true that a man does not easily change his barber or carpenter or washer­ man or potter as payment is made annually in grain, and old relationship­ ships are respected. But this does not mean that the inability or non-payment will be toler­ ated for a long time.

The strong rivalries which exist between the members of a non­ agricultural or servicing caste often force them to seek friends outside their own caste. Again, the lower castes, in spite of the troubles and humiliation of subordination, are aware that the system guarantees them a living. Members of different castes are also linked up in other ways: the relationships of landlord and tenant, master and servant, creditor and debtor, and patron and client ignore caste barriers to bind together people who are unequal. These relationships may also cross the village boundary, but a good many of them will be found inside it.

The concept of the "dominant caste" is relevant in this connec­ tion. A caste is dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area and econ­ nomically and politically exercises a prepondering influence. It need not be the highest caste in terms of traditional and conventional ranking of castes. The situation described by Dr Gough for Kumba­ pettai is no longer typical. Any caste may be the dominant caste in an area though I have not come across the Untouchables being dominant anywhere. Occasionally, a group originally outside the Hindu fold, such as the Coorgs or the Raj Gonds may become dominant by virtue of their numbers, wealth and martial prowess. The point that is important here is that the domi­ nant caste supports and maintains the total system. The dominant caste respects the code of every caste even when some features of its code are divergent, from the code of the dominant caste. Disputes occurring among the non-dominant castes are occasionally taken to the elders of the dominant caste. The autonomy of a caste court is only part of the story—there is a ten­ dency to refer disputes upwards locally to the elders of the domi­ nant caste as quite a few contribu­ tors have noticed. The elders of a caste living in a group of neigh­ bouring villages are called in only rarely to settle serious disputes which concern the caste exclusively. What is much more common is the type of case cited by Dr Gough. The Peasant (Okkaliga) elders of Rampura were frequently being called to settle disputes among the other castes including Muslims. This tendency does not probably obtain north of the Vindhyas.

The ties cutting across the lines of caste are then as important as the ties of caste. Emphasis on horizontal ties at the expense of vertical ones has been the cause of much confusion. Village unity can­ not however be reduced to the inter­ play of these various ties. It is normally not visible, but some in­ cident suddenly and strikingly re­ veals its existence. When the vil­ lage is threatened with an epidemic or drought or floods or fire, or when the government passes an order which the villagers regard as un­ just, or on certain religious occa­ sions, or in a fight with a neighbour­ ing village, the unity of the village reveals itself in an unmistakable manner.

In his article on "Village Struc­ ture in North Kerala" (9th Febru­ ary, 1952), Dr Miller states that Nambudri Brahmins "are partly superior to terrestrial divisions". This is an important point. The Brahmin, by virtue of his ritual position, seems to both belong to the village and not belong to it. For instance, in a fight between two villages a Brahmin priest of one of the villages would probably not be beaten unless he had personally participated in the light, whereas in the case of a member of, say, one of the middle castes, personal partici­ pation would probably not be a necessary condition of his being beaten. This does not mean that the Brahmin is free to do what he wants. Mr Bailey gives an instance of a Brahmin being disciplined by the others, and I was told about a similar incident in Kere, a village near Rampura.

The position, then, is complicated. The Brahmin is given some respect by virtue of his ritual position, but he is not allowed to take advantage of this to do what he pleases. There is a line which he may not cross. In an exactly opposite sense untouchables are both part of and not part of the village. The Mus­ lims too have such a position, and this is because they are outside the Hindu fold. Some of those living in the village may be said to be full members while others are only parti­ cipating in the activities of the vil­ lage. It is rather a matter serious in­ vestigation. Comparison with hier­archical systems in other parts of the world will probably show some light.

The strength of caste has increas­ ed in the last few decades, and bit­ terness between castes is seen most in the towns. In the villages the complementariness of castes is still visible. One of the effects of Brit­ ish rule has been the increase in caste solidarity. What Dr Miller says about pre-British north Kerala is also true of a good part of the entire country: "The main struc­ tural cleavages were between terri­
torial units — villages, chiefdoms, kingdoms—not between castes. Inner-caste relations were, on the contrary, of a complementary nature, involving traditionally ordained and clear cut rights and obligations, authority, and subordination. The imposition of Pax Britannica over the whole country weakened vertical ties, and strengthened horizontal ones. The building of roads and railways and the coining of printed books and newspapers widened the range of castes and increased their solidarity—witness, for instance, the efflorescence of caste journals and newspapers. Mr Bailey has suggested (21st March 1953, p 328) that as the village gets more closely integrated with the larger economy of the country, it becomes less of a unity. Such integration is increasing everyday and the effects of widespread industrialisation and increased paternalism on the part of the State will be increasingly to reduce this sense of unity. Dr Gougli phrases it that "the gradual drift to the cities of an educated aristocracy, the transfer of land to middle-class trading families of the towns, and the infiltration of a small, autonomous working class group supported by urban forms of labour have begun this process, and it may be expected to continue until the village has lost its traditional integration and become 'little more than a unit of neighbourhood'."

Does a sense of unity exist in dispersed villages? A nucleated village can be easily identified; the houses and huts are huddled in the middle and the fields lie all round. It is easy to distinguish one village from another. But this is not so in north Kerala, Coorg and the western parts of Mysore. Dr Miller tells us "a physical, territorial unity may exist, but it is not often obvious, because of scattered settlement. . . . Economic unity may be modified by the extension of caste obligations to several villages or their restriction to a segment of a single village. "Thus, the family of the Kanisam (astrologer) caste might have less than enough work in its own village, A, and be the official astrologer family serving the adjoining village B as well. Basket-making families in B might serve villages in A and C in addition to their own. The family of a small sub-caste that cuts hair and assists at funerals of the blacksmith and carpenter castes may well have a clientele in a dozen other villages."

Thus the local settlement in Kerala is the meeting place of several non-agricultural castes each of which serves a different set of villages. This feature is not unknown in nucleated villages, but it is not so striking. Dr Miller rightly concludes that "... although any sociological investigator in Kerala may provisionally take the modern desam as a unit for study, he must examine the scale of social relations over a broader area. Whatever internal self-subsistence there may have been in the desams of the eighteenth century and earlier, it is very difficult nowadays in Kerala to point to any unit as a clearly demarcated, coherent, independent village community."

The village may be a nebulous concept in Kerala, but this does not mean that there is no local community there. Only it does not coincide with any administrative unit. The castes in an area are interdependent and have strong ties to each other. This situation is not however peculiar to the dispersed area. Even a nucleated village has a number of intimate links with its neighbours. What Dr Marian Smith says of the Punjab village is probably applicable to many other villages as well. "In terms of economic and social specialisation, marital ties, and religious and political organisation, the structural unit is larger than the village. These are not contacts in which the villagers may indulge, they are imposed upon him by the habits of his existence. Important as these village studies may be, therefore . . . it does not seem to me that any complete picture of Punjab life can ever be obtained from them alone."

The village's social field is thus much wider than his village. Kin, economic, religious and other social ties enlarge the field to include a circle of neighbouring villages. Rut ever since the beginning of British rule, political and economic decisions taken in London and Manchester have affected the Indian peasant in his remotest village. And in Independent India, not a day passes without some fresh evidence of the government's solicitude for the rural folk. The social anthropologist who studies a single village should not only bear in mind its ties with other villages, but also that political and economic forces set in motion in the larger society affect it fundamentally.

What has been said above has direct bearing on the question of the self-sufficiency of the villages, a point which has been adequately dealt with by Dr Marian Smith. "As long as we mean by self-sufficiency in India an earlier condition under which few manufactured items were introduced into the village from outside, we are treading on fairly safe ground. But so soon as we imply by the term that the shift toward industrialisation involves a shift toward specialisation and toward interdependency, we are falling very wide of the mark. The effect of industrialisation upon the Indian village is to shift from one sort of interdependency to another, from one sort of specialisation to another". The completely self-sufficient village republic is a myth: it was always part of a wider entity. Only villages in pre-British India were less dependent economically on the towns than villages today.

There is in this connection an important difference between north and south Indian villages, and this is remarked upon by both Mr Marrriot and Dr Smith. In continental India, ie, India between the Himalayas and Vindhyas, a man marries outside his village. In fact an exogamous circle with a radius of four miles may be drawn around a man's village: in UP the average distance of marriage is twelve miles while in the Punjab "two-thirds of the marriages have taken place with villages between four and twelve miles from Jhabal, with the greatest number clustering around the eight-mile radius". Village exogamy is combined with hypergamy, ie, village A only receives brides from B, but does not return the compliment. One of the effects of village exogamy and hypergamy is to spatially widen the range of ties. These are not repetitive, but extensive. An exactly opposite principle obtains in peninsular India. The preference for marriage with certain near relatives such as a cross cousin and cross niece (a man's elder sister's daughter) has a limiting effect on the social space of the peasant. Such relatives often live in the same or nearby village. The village is not an exogamous unit. Preference for marriage with certain relatives tends to multiply the bonds one has with the same body or bodies of people. Intensification is the operative principle in south India while extension is the principle in the north. The significance of this difference in other features of social life has yet to be studied. Cross cousin marriage in India has so far been studied only at the kin-